

Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, June 4, 2011
Norwood, Colorado

Southwest Resource Advisory Council Members

Peter Mueller, Eric Sanford, Ken Emory, Kathy Welt, Buck McGee, Jim Cochran, Dan Morse, Wally White, Gerald Koppenhafer, Barbara Hawke, Andrea Robinsong, Andy Gulliford, Al Heaton

Staff

Lori Armstrong, Connie Clementon, Jana Moe, Marietta Eaton, Barb Sharrow, Brian St. George, Bill Dunkelberger, Shannon Borders

Visitors

Art Goodtimes

The meeting was called to order by chairperson Kathy Welt at 9:30 a.m. Jim Cochran moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Al Heaton seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously. A quorum for the meeting was determined.

Reports from each field office and the district managers as follows:

Southwest District

- A memo issued by the Secretary regarding Wildlands (Executive Order 3310) was handed out. The memo stated the BLM will not confirm any areas as wilderness.
- Supplemental Rules on Fireworks: The rules will eliminate use of fireworks on public lands for safety and fire concerns. The Federal Register Notice and the Final Fireworks Rules documents were distributed. The rules will be consistent with the Forest Service regulations. If a Ranger comes across violators, then he/she can cite the offender. The public can turn them in as well. This is a proposed rule that will come out after July 4
- Helen Hankins, BLM, and Rick Cables, Forest Service, made the decision to move away from dual delegation within the San Juan Public Lands Center as of Oct. 1, 2011. This means the BLM and the Forest service will continue to work together in order to serve the public and where it benefits both agencies. The intent is to stop working around the technology and regulation barriers. Lori Armstrong, District Manager, is tasked with developing a staffing and transition plan. The BLM will continue to sign agreements to complete work for the other agency; therefore, they will not be required to use the other agencies technology platform that requires an additional computer from the other agency. The RAC is welcome to provide input.

San Juan Public Lands Center

- The SJPLC Land and Resource Management Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, analyzing the potential effects of increased oil and gas development in the Paradox gothic shale play is undergoing final review by the BLM and FS Washington offices. Plans are to release the final draft for the public

review and comment in July. Comments will be addressed and incorporated in the SJPLC joint BLM/FS Final Land and Resource Management Plan EIS and Record of Decision slated for release in 2012

- The Columbine Field Office is finalizing conveyance of 100 acres of public lands to the Town of Silverton under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. The town has leased these adjacent lands for the past 10 years.
- The GMUG NF and SJPLC are pursuing acquisition of some Standard Metals mining claims in San Juan (285 BLM acres, 430 FS acres) and Ouray (280 acres) counties. Staff is completing environmental site assessments to ensure we acquire “clean” lands.
- The proposed Sunnyside Gold land exchange has been approved – BLM would acquire 217 acres in Animas Forks National Historic town site; Sunnyside acquires 82 acres of BLM where existing operations and reclamation are occurring. The closing is in August.
- La Plata County BOCC recently approved an MOU for cost sharing to complete an environmental analysis to acquire 57 acres of BLM lands for a multi-purpose event center. The lands are mostly within an existing gravel mining area at Grandview, located in the southeast portion of the town of Durango. The county owns 40 adjacent acres.
- The EPA will give an overview and presentation on water quality issues in the Cement Creek area of Silverton on June 16 at the Silverton Town Hall, as part of a series of informational meetings hosted by the Town of Silverton and the Animas River Stakeholders Group. The area in question is comprised of public lands and many mining claims and has been a focus for ongoing Mined Land Reclamation activities for several years. During initial remediation of the area, Cement Creek water quality improved, which also improved water quality in the Animas River. Over the last several years, however; water quality in Cement Creek has begun to degrade, thereby affecting the water quality in the Animas River. Local USEPA staff and residents believe this degradation may be associated with the bulk-heading of the American Tunnel, partially located on BLM lands. The USEPA will present its initial findings at this meeting.
- Potash Exploration Proposal on Dolores Public Lands – RM Potash recently submitted an amended exploration plan, six proposed drill sites, field studies, scoping this summer, scheduling public meeting in Dove Creek.
- Dolores River Rafting Flows Update: As of June 1, the Dolores Water Conservancy District expects another peak inflow over the next few days and only three feet left to fill in McPhee Reservoir. Current releases are up to 1,200 CFS and may go higher based on weather over the next 48 hours. Releases are expected to remain high into the weekend and then will follow inflow. DWCD will announce the ramp down when the current pattern clears up.
- Connie Clemenston reported the travel management plan for Boggie Glade is going back out to the public and the Dolores River dialog is ongoing. Protests have calmed down, but she thinks it will increase as documents are released to the public.
- Range allotments in the Dolores Field Office are on hold until a person is hired.

Uncompahgre Field Office

- Work on the Resource Management Plan is fairly on schedule, and it is anticipated to be out for public comment by the fall of 2012. The Sub-RAC and cooperating agencies have provided invaluable input into the process. The Dominquez Escalante RMP is also on going.
- Mike Davis was hired as the FMO for the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit. The staff is preparing a prescribed burn plan in Dry Park near Norwood and are in the scoping process for a fuels reduction project near Hotchkiss.
- The Oxbow lease modification decision should be signed early next week. Oxbow also submitted an application to explore on Oak Mesa and this will go through the NEPA process.
- They are working with SG Interests on a proposal for 150 wells. The EA is nearly finished and ready for public comment.
- The Dry Creek Travel Management Plan was completed.

Gunnison Field Office

American Recovery and Revitalization Act Projects

- Six projects in the Gunnison Basin completed
- One project remains to be completed

Candidate Conservation Agreement for Gunnison Sage Grouse

- New project manager hired (begins in July)
- Sage grouse status review listing decision highlights residential development, habitat, fragmentation and rangeland health as key risks
- CCA addresses those risk factors; currently, developing a habitat screening tool to target our management within the Basin

Geothermal Lease Application

- Two appeals; have worked unsuccessfully to resolve those appeals without litigation
- Protests are being reviewed and addressed in Washington
- Governor's review has elapsed with no comments from the state

Climate Change

- Continue to work with The Nature Conservancy, local land managers and private interests on a Gunnison Basin climate initiative
- Develop a rapid climate vulnerability assessment for Upper Gunnison Basin to determine which species and habitats are most at risk to climate change
- Develop practical management strategies to reduce adverse effects on key species and habitats
- Build resilience to climate change, increase understanding of threats and promote coordinated and effective implementation of these strategies

Upper Slate River Watershed Management

- Began scoping and planning for a recreation and watershed management plan on the Slate River north of Crested Butte

- Successful in obtaining 319 grand funding and our partnership with Coal Creek Watershed Coalition which has not assumed management responsibility and fiscal administration
- Grant (\$60k) will fund a watershed coordinator, hydrologic studies and development of a watershed plan
- Additional planning may include recreation site plan, river bank stabilization, abandoned mine cleanup and private land issues

Hartman Rocks Planning

- Primarily addressing human impacts from camping, climbing and shooting
- Secondly continuing to address trail issues
- Input from RAC on liability issues

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument/Anasazi Heritage Center

- Marietta Eaton was introduced as the new Canyons of the Ancients/Anasazi Heritage Center manager. She indicated that her goal is to integrate the AHC and the Monument.
- Currently, the staff is working with Colorado State University to develop a field school for a new master's program.
- The Law Enforcement Officers are monitoring over 100 archeological sites and are working to improve public education and awareness.
- Some allotments on the Monument have been retired. Two are vacant and they are considering the land health before making a decision to reopen the allotment.
- The National Riparian team has been helping assess the land health.
- On July 25-27, the Resource Management Plan implementation workshop will be held.
- ARRA funds were used in conjunction with the SW Conservation district to plant shrubs with DriWater.
- The local Master Gardeners are planting native plants in the AHC beds.
- Kinder Morgan is getting ready to start drilling in June including three pads and six wells. They will have security at this site 24/7.
- The new solar array was officially opened with a ribbon cutting performed by Helen Hankins, BLM State Director. The solar array has provided up to 95% of the energy for AHC on a single day.

Colorado Senate Joint Resolution 11-040/Spring Creek Wild Horse Gather

The Colorado Senate Joint Resolution 11-040, supports BLM's management practices and fertility control methods. This impacts the Spring Creek Wild Horse herd near Norwood. The Dolores Field Office is working through the NEPA process for a gather for the Spring Creek herd scheduled in mid-September.

BLM Camping Rule

Lori Armstrong distributed the new camping rules published in the June 10, 2010, Federal Register notice. The BLM is amending supplementary rules relating to camping on public lands in Colorado. These rules extend the time the public must remain absent from a site once the current 14-day camping stay limit is reached. They also require that once campers have camped for 14 days, they must move away from that particular location for 30 days, rather than seven days, before returning. Lori explained that these rules are currently in effect, but the RAC could submit a recommendation to the State Director to amend the rules. The RAC members debated the distance and time. They also indicated that hunting needs to be addressed separately.

Buck McGee moved to refute the rule as posted in the FRN. Andy Gulliford seconded the motion. Discussion followed. Dan Morse said every agency has regulations similar to this rule and said this RAC should write something to give law enforcement authority and to provide a reasonable distance within the existing rule. Andrea Robinsong said the conditions vary between offices, and asked if there is a possibility each field office could determine the distance and write a rule for flexibility. Barb Sharrow explained that this is a state-wide rule, and if the rules are not working in an area then the BLM could be more restrictive. The field manager could also issue an authorization for activities to extend the time limits. Varying rules within each field office also causes public confusion and discontentment. Eric Sanford moved to amend the motion to determine an average distance based on each RAC members suggestion. The amendment was accepted by Buck McGee. The motion failed with two members in favor.

The discussion continued with Ken Emory's suggestion to drop the distance altogether. Jim Cochran asked how much of a problem the BLM has with campers staying beyond 14 days. He suggested asking for an evaluation over a year to determine how much of a problem. Andy Gulliford said this is backwards, because they created a rule without RAC input. Lori Armstrong said the State Director acknowledged that the RAC didn't get a chance to provide input. Andrea Robinsong moved to maintain the 14-day limit and change the existing rules from 30 miles to 10 road miles and give the Field Office Managers the ability to write exceptions as needed. Andy Gulliford seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Public Comments

David Glynn-Wild Horse Activist

- He said he has spent years riding and living with the Spring Creek horses.
- He is writing a book on wild horses.
- He indicated that he was kind of puzzled about why the RAC didn't take action on the state resolution.
- He said the BLM has been trying to zero out the two herd areas.
- This year there are about 80 horses. The acreage should be bigger for a viable heard of 200. We lost those acres. Why? It was paired down and he doesn't think that it's right. He said BLM should be going in the opposite direction.
- Now Colorado is passing a resolution to further reduce the herds.

- Kathy Welt explained that the RAC passed a resolution last year regarding wild horses and burros.

Arleen Antonelly, Concerned Citizen

- I think they should take a high powered shot and let the horses die where they are familiar. I've seen horses getting put in little cages otherwise known as holding pens. I understand what you're trying to do with stallions, but I don't think that makes for good herd dynamics.
- The range has changed over the years and now there's predator control and there's not anymore. She hates to see them penned up and trucked out. Even she doesn't put her horses in pens. Personally she doesn't think the government should spend the money to feed these animals.
- After the civil war, the people brought their horses with them and mixed with the other horses.
- The water is not quality for all horses. When they are out by themselves they are different. It's cool and emotional, but they deserve a better of quality of life.
- Have you heard that some people put a marble in the uterus to fool them into pregnancy so they won't cycle.

Gunnison County O&G Rules

Gunnison County has, as of today, written new regulations regarding the distances from water bodies to oil and gas development sites. The county regulations require a distance of 500 feet and go beyond the current state regulations of 300 feet. Eric Sanford reported that SG Interests filed a petition to amend the Gunnison County regulations regarding the water body set back distances to comply with the state's standards. SG Interest is also encouraging additional coordination with all parties.

Agenda Items for the Next Meeting

At the next meeting, state office staff will facilitate RecRAC training once the the new charters are signed. Additional items for the next meeting are: CANM Science Plan, updates on transition plan for the SJPLC and updates on rare earth metals from the Gunnison Field Office.

Adjournment

Eric Sanford moved to adjourn the meeting. Buck McGee seconded the motion. The motion carried.